



# MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

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## PASSOVER SPECULATIONS

Over the years, and especially recently, I have come to realize that many things we have been told about the Bible simply are not in the Bible. We have many traditions of action that cannot clearly be taught by scripture. Then there are also questions of interpretation that come up because of newer trends that would not have been asked years ago. In this season of Passover (April 15-24, 2014) there are some particular things that have been taught that fall into these categories.

The Passover story can be found in Exodus 11-13. The essentials are this: it was the last of the plagues on Egypt, the Passover lamb was to be killed and its blood put on the doorposts and lintels, God killed the firstborn of man and beast that were not in a house with the blood on it, and Pharaoh drove the Israelites out of Egypt. Those are facts found in the Bible. There are other details as well, but those are the basic essentials.

The people of Israel were told to ask their slave masters for jewelry of valuable metals before they left. Why? Obviously to have them later on, but also to impoverish Egypt. But why would a Egyptian give their gold jewelry, some of it very valuable, to a slave? This may be one of the many miracles recorded in Exodus. "And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people." (Ex 11:3) Many Egyptians remembered Moses as the son of Pharaoh's daughter forty years before, perhaps. In any case, they gave up the gold out of respect for Moses' stature. If, as some rabbis state, the ten plagues occurred over a two to three year period, many Egyptians who had not previously known Moses had gained a favorable reputation because of his ability to bring on the plagues. (See Ex 9:20 and 10:7) Fact: Israel plundered the Egyptians of their valuables. Speculation: It was a miracle.

Moses told Pharaoh that all the firstborn of Egypt would die, but those of Israel would not. (Ex 11:4-7) He told the Israelites to kill the lambs and put their blood on the doorposts and lintels, and that they were not to leave their houses that night. (Ex 12) The implication is that if they left their houses they would be subject to the plague. But that would negate what Moses had said to Pharaoh about putting a separation between Egypt and Israel. It has long been taught, also, that if any of the Egyptians had

done the same thing with the blood, they would be exempt from the plague. But this would also negate the separation. It is probable that a Jew who went out of his house that night would die. It is possible that some of the Egyptians could have saved their firstborn by following the Israelite example with the blood. It is possible that neither is true. Fact: the destroyer passed over the Israelite houses that had the blood on the doorposts. Speculation: he also passed over any Egyptian houses that had blood on the doorposts, and killed any Israelite found outside his house.

Now an interesting legal question. The Israelites were told, "no uncircumcised person shall eat" of the Passover meal. (Ex 12:48) For many years in the United States, circumcision was a commonly accepted medical practice, for Jews and Gentiles alike. Granted, the circumcisions done in a hospital were generally not done by a properly trained *mohel*; nevertheless, the question arises: if a circumcised non-Jewish person chooses to eat of the Passover meal, is that acceptable? On the face of it, it would be. Modern rabbis require that a circumcised gentile male who wishes to become religiously Jewish undergo a ceremonial cutting. This would probably also be the Jewish response to a non-Jew who chose to participate in the Passover. In the Christian tradition, however, Paul speaks of Christians as being "circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands." (Col 2:11) While a Jew would not accept this, many gentile Christians believe they can participate in at least a form of the Passover meal regardless of their physical state. Fact: God said not to let an uncircumcised male eat of the Passover. Speculation: the circumcision of removal of sin qualifies. Fact: Jesus took the Passover meal and made it a memorial of his death, burial, and resurrection. In that sense, any Christian who partakes of the Lord's Supper participates in the Passover.

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# WINGS

There's an old song that is not sung in churches as often these days. It begins, "Night, with ebon pinion, brooded o'er the vale." Maybe it isn't sung because young people today are wondering what is a pinion, and why would night be brooding? Even a few older people used to sing it without understanding the symbolism. Translation: Night, black winged, sat over the valley like a hen sitting on her nest. The poet was simply taking what appears to be a common biblical theme and applying it in his verse. The Bible has a lot to say about wings, perhaps because the agrarian societies common at the time of its writing were quite familiar with winged animals.

Of course, many references in the Bible are to literal wings on literal animals. After all, on the fifth day God created "every winged fowl after his kind." (Gen 1:21) The number of animals with wings, when you include the insects, outnumbers the animals without. Naturally many of them would be mentioned in the Bible. There are, however, other references to wings.

## Other Winged Beings

Not everything that is described as having wings is an earthly creature. There are some very unusual

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references to wings, most notably when describing cherubim or cherubs.

When most people think of a cherub they are picturing a fat little kid with wings and maybe a bow and arrow. Medieval and Renaissance art has colored our thinking about what a cherub should look like. Somehow it seems that DaVinci and his ilk did not read the way the Bible describes a cherub.

They had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight

forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. (Ezek 1:5-11)

This is hardly the way artists picture the angels around the Christ child. In fact, this sounds more like the imaginings of Goya or Bosch than of Botticelli or Michelangelo. These beings are more frightening than angelic.

There are similar beings in the Revelation, or they may just be a different description of the same beings. These, however, don't appear to be attached to each other in a square, as were Ezekiel's cherubim.

In the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within. (Rev 4:6-8)

Of course, both of these descriptions are in highly symbolic books. We have no way of knowing whether cherubs, which are presumably an order of angels, really look like this, or if these are merely human descriptions of something indescribable.

Obviously, though, somebody was at one time given a blueprint for what a cherub looked like. Moses had Betzalel create two of the beings to cover the ark of the covenant. Nothing is said in the passages about these sculptures about each having six wings. Apparently they had only two.

And thou shalt make two cherubim of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: even of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubim on the two ends thereof. And the cherubim shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. (Ex 25:18-20)

In Exodus these beings were facing each other and their wings covered the mercy seat. Compare with that the same object, but in the Temple that Solomon built.

And within the oracle he made two cherubim of olive tree, each ten cubits high. And five cubits was the one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the other

wing of the cherub: from the uttermost part of the one wing unto the uttermost part of the other were ten cubits. And the other cherub was ten cubits: both the cherubim were of one measure and one size. The height of the one cherub was ten cubits, and so was it of the other cherub. And he set the cherubim within the inner house: and they stretched forth the wings of the cherubim, so that the wing of the one touched the one wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall; and their wings touched one another in the midst of the house. (1 Kings 6:23-27)

Solomon's version had the cherubim facing forward with wings stretched sideward. Either way, these winged creatures accompanied God when he appeared above the ark.

## Upon wings

In the early days of aviation, air shows commonly had daredevils called wing walkers. These people were sometimes actually strapped to the top of the wing and had very little risk of falling. Others, however, were not so securely attached and may have actually walked on the wings of the planes as they flew. Sometimes these people fell to their deaths. Still, one of the thrills of the air shows was wondering how safe the wing walker actually was.

God is himself a wing walker. He, though is absolutely safe, even though the wings he walks are not as solid as those of the aircraft. "He did fly upon the wings of the wind." (Ps 18:10) He also "walketh upon the wings of the wind." (Ps 104:3)

Surely a God who walks on the wind is a mighty God. I can trust someone who has that kind of power.

This powerful God even gives us the strength to do what he does. We can ride on wings.

Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. (Isa 40:30-31)

## Under Wings

More common, though, is the picture of a God who shelters with his wings. This is the picture in the song mentioned at the start of this article. A mother (or sometimes father) bird will protect the chicks by sitting on the nest and covering them with her wings. Even outside the nest, some birds will protect their young by taking them under their wings. In fact, that has given us a common metaphor about mentoring another person.

God is very protective of his people. "Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings," the psalmist pleads. (Ps 17:8) He later describes the result of hiding there. "How excellent is thy

lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings." (Ps 36:7) David, although a shepherd, had observed the protection the parent birds had for their young, and sought the same from God. "Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge." (Ps 57:1)

David was not the only one who knew about mother hens. That was also one of the most famous word pictures used by Jesus.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! (Matt 23:7; Lk 13:34)

Jesus spoke these words to Jerusalem. He desired most of all that the Jewish people would come to him for protection, rather than relying on themselves. But the

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lesson is not just for Jerusalem. How many of us wander away from God's protective wings? We think we can direct our own lives. We think we know how to take care of ourselves. In that we are like young fowl, who try to leave the protection of the hen's wing. But it is when the chick moves away that it is most vulnerable to attack by predators. There are hawks and foxes all around us. We don't know the dangers of the world outside of God's protection. We think there is nothing that can harm us, not realizing that we have been sheltered from harm. When we leave that shelter we fall prey to all kinds of sin. And Jesus is there, saying he longs to take us back under his wing. How sad to hear, "but ye would not." It is not that he does not want to protect us; we sometimes refuse that protection. It's like some of those police movies where a person is offered protective custody, but they refuse and end up getting killed by the bad guy. When we refuse protective custody under his wings, we are opening ourselves up to deadly attacks.

But even so, wings come into play. When we are injured by sin, God's wings are there. Not only does he want to take us back under his wings, but when we hurt his wings can ease the pain. "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." (Mal 4:2)

Wings can be frightening, thrilling, protective, and healing. God created wings. Although humans don't have them, we are enthralled by them. And maybe sometimes protected, too.

# A PREPOSITION FOR YOU

What difference can a preposition make? To a grammar Nazi, quite a bit. To say a man jumped into a train can be the same as or considerably different than saying he jumped onto a train. In one sense they are one and the same; in another he is either inside or on top of the train, a distinction that could seriously affect his safety. To some, such grammar distinctions are technical exercises that are beyond the average person. To others, the variations make all the difference. For instance, one may question the various translations of a passage such as Matthew 3:17 or 17:5.

The first of these passages is Matthew's account of the immersion of Jesus. He came up out of the water, the Spirit descended in the form of a dove, and God spoke. The second is the account of the transfiguration, at which God also spoke. The words spoken contained an identical phrase.

"This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." (King James, American Standard) Or is it "with whom I am well pleased" (New International, English Standard, Revised Standard)? And does it really make a difference?

In the Matthew passages and in Mark 1:11, the Greek text is identical. The word translated "in" or "with" is a single word. Over 1,000 times it is translated "in." A little over 400 times it is translated "with." There are circumstances in which one or the other is clearly the right choice. This is not one of those circumstances. In some ways this is like the into/onto a train example. It may not make a difference, or it may make all the difference.

"In whom" basically implies that God was pleased with the Son because of who he intrinsically was. It is the picture of a father who loves his son unconditionally. In that sense, "in whom" gives us all hope. If God can love

Jesus just because he is the Son of God, then he can love us because we are the creation of God. No matter how sinful I may become, God can be well pleased "in" me. After all, after Jesus compared himself to the life-giving bronze serpent in the wilderness, John adds the comment that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son," that those who trust in him may have life.

On the other hand, "with whom" may mean the same thing, or it may mean that God was pleased with what Jesus had done. Even though he had not yet paid the ultimate price, God was pleased with him because of his actions up to that time. This is a little less hopeful. If God is pleased "with" someone because of their actions, we are all doomed. Since none of us have lived the sinless life that Jesus lived, God cannot be pleased "with" us. And yet he was pleased with the Son, who takes our place; therefore, through Christ, God is pleased with us if we are placing our trust in Jesus.

There is one more grammatical twist to the matter. Peter mentions the transfiguration in one of his letters, and recounts what God said. But he uses a different Greek word for "in" than Matthew and Mark do. The word Peter uses in 2 Peter 1:17 is a word more commonly translated "into." It is the same word used in Acts 2:38: "Repent, and be immersed every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for [or into, or towards] the remission of your sins." So Peter's version would say that God directed his pleasure toward the Son. In a similar manner, God directs his love toward us. The difference seems to be in our response. God's love is sent our way; we may accept it through trust, or we may reject it.

Fine distinctions. Perhaps. Which is right? Perhaps all. The ultimate conclusion is that God loves.

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